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NODIS
FOR AMBASSADOR FROM SAUNDERS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PEPR, LE, SY, US, XF

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH ASSAD

1. AS WE AGREED IN WASHINGTON, YOUR FAREWELL CALL ON ASSAD OFFERS A GOOD OPPORTUNITY FOR A SUMMING-UP OF THE U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP AND TO SET THE STAGE NOT ONLY FOR YOUR SUCCESSOR BUT FOR THE FUTURE EVOLUTION OF OUR ASSOCIATION. FOLLOWING IS A CHECKLIST OF KEY POINTS YOU MIGHT MAKE AS YOU PURSUE YOUR AGENDA OF (1) THE U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP; (2) THE PEACE PROCESS; (3) LEBANON; AND (4) BILATERAL PROGRAMS OF COOPERATION IN THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FIELDS IN PARTICULAR.

2. U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP:

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-- WE RECALL THAT ASSAD SAID TO YOU IN YOUR FIRST MEETING WITH HIM THAT SYRIA WANTS TO BROADEN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP EVEN WHEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS DISAGREE ON CERTAIN GENERAL MIDDLE EAST POLICIES RELATING TO ISRAEL OR PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. WE HAVE APPRECIATED THAT SYRIA HAS CONDUCTED ITS RELATIONSHIP IN THIS SPIRIT, AND WE FULLY SHARE THIS APPROACH.

-- WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT OUR DIALOGUE ON MAJOR ISSUES REMAINS CANDID AND OPEN. WE SHOULD EXCHANGE VIEWS FREQUENTLY AND FREELY, SO THAT NO MISUNDERSTANDINGS DEVELOP. THIS HAS BEEN A HALLMARK OF OUR RECENT RELATIONSHIP AND IT HAS BEEN EXTREMELY SATISFYING TO US THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN READY TO GIVE US A HEARING FOR OUR VIEWPOINTS. THE REVERSE IS ALSO NECESSARY. IF THE SYRIANS ARE UNSATISFIED BY SOME OF OUR POSITIONS, WE WANT THEM TO LET US KNOW IMMEDIATELY.

-- THE U.S. HAS BEEN ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE SYRIAN POSITION ON IMPORTANT ISSUES, BOTH WHEN WE HAVE AGREED AND WHEN WE HAVE DISAGREED WITH IT. ASSAD HAS BEEN CONSISTENTLY HONEST AND STRAIGHTFORWARD WITH US IN EXPLAINING HIS POSITION SINCE THE NEGOTIATIONS LEADING UP TO SINAI II.

-- WE BELIEVE THE ECONOMIC PROGRAM WE HAVE DEVELOPED IS MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL, IS VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF U.S. INTEREST IN SYRIA'S DEVELOPMENT, AND IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF OUR COMMON APPROACH TO OUR RELATIONSHIP. SIMILARLY, WE WERE GRATIFIED BY THE SYRIAN WISH TO EXPAND COOPERATION AND EXCHANGES IN THE CULTURAL AND ACADEMIC FIELDS. WE INTEND TO DEVOTE MUCH ATTENTION TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF THESE PROGRAMS.

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3. PEACE NEGOTIATIONS:

-- THE U.S. CONTINUES TO SEE SYRIA AS IMPORTANT TO THE ULTIMATE SUCCESS OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. WE RECOGNIZE THAT SYRIA STILL ACCEPTS 242 AND 338 AND WISHES TO KEEP THE DOOR OPEN FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT IN A GENEVA OR SIMILAR FRAMEWORK.

-- THE U.S. REMAINS FIRMLY COMMITTED TO A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE SETTLEMENT AND WILL WORK ACTIVELY TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR SYRIA TO REJOIN THE PROCESS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

-- SYRIA HAS BEEN CRITICAL OF OUR SUPPORT FOR THE SADAT INITIATIVE. WE HAVE TO FACE THE FACT, HOWEVER, THAT THIS INITIATIVE PRODUCED A BREAKTHROUGH THAT THE U.S. ALONE WAS NOT ABLE TO ACHIEVE. IT HAS HAD AN ENORMOUS--AND POSITIVE--EFFECT ON INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION AND INTERNATIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE ARAB POSITION. A MOMENTUM

HAS BEEN IMPARTED TO THE PEACE PROCESS WHICH WE FIRMLY

BELIEVE MUST BE ENCOURAGED. OUR SUPPORT FOR THE SADAT INITIATIVE DOES NOT MEAN WE ARE RELEGATING OTHER PARTIES TO A LESS IMPORTANT POTENTIAL ROLE. SYRIA, JORDAN, LEBANON, AND THE PALESTINIANS HAVE TO BE INVOLVED AND PARTICIPATE IN DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT.

-- FOR THE MOMENT, IT IS TOO SOON TO PREDICT HOW THE FORCES SET IN MOTION BY MORE THAN FIFTEEN MONTHS OF EFFORT WILL ACHIEVE THE SETTLEMENT WE ALL SEEK, BUT OUR EYE REMAINS ON THIS AS THE ULTIMATE GOAL.

-- WE HAVE ALWAYS AGREED WITH ASSAD'S POSITION THAT ARAB UNITY IN THE PEACE PROCESS IS VITAL. THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION'S EFFORT BEGAN ON THE HEELS OF THE UNITY
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DEVELOPED AMONG THE MODERATE ARAB STATES IN THE 1976 RIYADH MINI-SUMMIT, WHICH BROUGHT AN END TO THE LEBANESE CIVIL CONFLICT AND SET THE STAGE FOR OUR LATER PEACE-MAKING EFFORTS IN 1977. THE U.S. HOPES THAT SYRIA AND EGYPT WILL MEND THEIR DIFFERENCES AND AGREE TO COOPERATE ONCE AGAIN, ALONG WITH OTHER LIKE-MINDED STATES, IN PURSUIT OF A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT.

4. LEBANON:

-- THE U.S. IS DEEPLY APPRECIATIVE OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE SYRIA HAS PLAYED IN LEBANON, IN BRINGING THE CIVIL CONFLICT TO AN END AND PROVIDING SINCE THEN THE SECURITY AND STABILITY WHICH THE GOVERNMENT IN BEIRUT SO DESPERATELY NEEDS. IT IS A THANKLESS TASK IN MANY RESPECTS, BUT IT IS ALSO AN ACT OF SYRIAN STATESMANSHIP.

-- IN RECENT WEEKS, THE U.S. HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY APPRECIATIVE OF THE BEHIND-THE-SCENES ROLE OF SYRIA IN MAKING POSSIBLE ADOPTION OF SC RESOLUTION 425 AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIFIL. SYRIAN EFFORTS TO CONTROL THE REINFORCEMENTS FLOWING DANGEROUSLY INTO LEBANON WAS NOTED, AS WAS SYRIAN RESTRAINT AND PATIENCE IN THE FACE OF THE ISRAELI MILITARY OPERATION.

-- SARKIS TOLD THE SECRETARY THAT HE COULD NOT REBUILD AN INTERNAL CONSENSUS UNTIL LEBANESE CONTROL OVER SOUTH LEBANON WAS REESTABLISHED. HE ALSO HAS MADE CLEAR HIS GRATITUDE FOR THE IMPORTANT ROLE THE SYRIAN FORCES HAVE BEEN PLAYING.

-- THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIFIL AND THE MANDATE IN 425 TO HELP EXTEND THE AUTHORITY OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IN
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THE SOUTH OFFERS THE BEST HOPE YET THAT THE PROBLEM IN THE SOUTH CAN BE RESOLVED IN A WAY WHICH PROTECTS LEBANESE NATIONAL INTERESTS, AND SYRIA'S. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE PROBLEM MAY BE THE ANSWER.

-- THE U.S. HAS BEEN WORKING HARD TO BRING ABOUT ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL BY A DATE IN APRIL. SOME WITHDRAWALS HAVE ALREADY OCCURRED. TO SPUR THE ISRAELIS, WE HAVE MADE ALL-OUT EFFORTS TO BRING INTO UNIFIL ADDITIONAL TROOP CONTRIBUTORS. WE ARE PROVIDING EQUIPMENT FOR THOSE TROOPS NEEDING IT, AND WE HAVE CONDUCTED MASSIVE AIRLIFT OPERATIONS. WE WILL ALSO BE THE PRINCIPAL FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTOR FOR UNIFIL.

-- IN RECENT DAYS, THE NIGERIANS, THE SENEGALESE, THE NORWEGIANS, THE FRENCH, THE IRISH, AND THE FIJIAN HAVE MADE IMPORTANT OFFERS OF NEW TROOPS. BY ABOUT APRIL 26, THEREFORE, UNIFIL SHOULD HAVE RESPECTABLE MILITARY STRENGTH AND WE HOPE THAT BY THE END OF THE MONTH, OR SHORTLY THEREAFTER, UNIFIL WILL HAVE REACHED ITS GOAL OF 4,000 MEN.

-- AS UNIFIL CONSOLIDATES ITS POSITION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, AND AS THE PEOPLE DISPLACED BY FIFTEEN MONTHS OF INSTABILITY AND FIGHTING RETURN TO THEIR HOMES AND FARMS, WE HOPE THAT SYRIA--AS AN ESSENTIAL SUPPORTER OF STABILITY IN LEBANON--WILL CONTINUE TO DO ITS SHARE IN SUPPORT OF SARKIS. WE BELIEVE THIS ALSO MEANS THAT THE VARIOUS PALESTINIAN GROUPS WILL HAVE TO BE CONTROLLED MORE STRICTLY. THE PALESTINIANS CONTINUE TO CONSTITUTE A MAJOR OBSTACLE TO A LEBANESE SOLUTION THROUGH THEIR ACTIVITIES. THE PALESTINIANS SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO BE IN A POSITION TO DISRUPT EFFORTS TO REUNIFY LEBANON OR TO SPARK OFF WIDER CONFLICT IN THE AREA. WE HOPE THAT SYRIA WILL SEE THIS IN THE SAME LIGHT AS WE AND TAKE THE
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NECESSARY MEASURES TO USE ITS INFLUENCE WITH THE PALESTINIANS TO ASSURE THAT THEY DO NOT DISRUPT RESTORATION OF LEBANESE AUTHORITY AND STABILITY IN SOUTH LEBANON.
-- WE RECOGNIZE THE DIFFICULTY THIS POSES FOR SYRIA, BUT WE THINK SYRIA SHOULD WEIGH CAREFULLY THE DANGERS TO SYRIAN INTERESTS OF AN UNCONTROLLED PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON.

-- IN THIS CONNECTION, WE HOPE THAT SYRIA WILL RETAIN AN
OPEN MIND IF, AS WE EXPECT, LEBANON AND THE UN SEEK SYRIAN
HELP IN GETTING BETTER CONTROL OVER THE AREA NORTH OF THE
LITANI. WE HOPE THAT SYRIA MIGHT CONSIDER MOVING INTO
THIS AREA, AT A MINIMUM TO CONTROL AND NEUTRALIZE
NABATIYAH. CHRISTOPHER

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